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Human rights questions: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Letter dated 8 November 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit information on freedom of belief and religion in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 71 (b) entitled "Human rights questions: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms".

(*Signed*) Alisher **Vohidov**
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Annex to the letter dated 8 November 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Information on measures by the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan to guarantee religious rights and freedoms

Representatives of the world's religions and beliefs have coexisted peacefully throughout history in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek people's developed sense of tolerance is an integral part of the culture in the country as it is today.

Freedom of religion and belief has great significance for Uzbekistan, which is home to representatives of 16 religions and whose Constitution and laws guarantee all citizens freedom of religious conscience.

Article 18 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan has reaffirmed that citizens have equal rights, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion, social origin, conscience, personal situation or societal status.

Uzbekistan currently has 2,202 registered religious organizations.

State registration of religious organizations is carried out in accordance with the Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan entitled "Procedure for the official registration of religious organizations in the Republic of Uzbekistan", of 20 June 1998.

A Council on issues of faith, attached to the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, has been established to forge close cooperation with religious organizations, to provide assistance in the activities of various religious beliefs, to develop joint proposals and measures for interreligious and inter-ethnic peace and harmony in society and to develop a culture of interfaith dialogue. Membership of the Council includes the leaders of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, the Tashkent and Central Asian eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Union of Christian Evangelical Baptist Churches, the Full Gospel Church Centre, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Tashkent Jewish community.

The faithful in Uzbekistan freely observe all religious holidays. With every passing year, Muslims mark Kurban Khait and Ramadan Khait, Christians mark Easter and Christmas and Jews mark Passover, Purim and Hanukkah on a larger and larger scale.

Furthermore, the authorities of the Republic of Uzbekistan provide all kinds of assistance to pilgrims travelling to holy sites: Muslims going to Saudi Arabia to perform umra and hajj, Christians going to Russia, Greece and Israel, and Jews going to Israel. Since independence alone, over 45,000 have been given assistance to make hajj pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia, and over 150 have been given assistance to make pilgrimages to Christian and Jewish holy sites in Russia, Greece and Israel.

Since independence, the following have been translated into Uzbek and published: the Koran, the Inzhil (two books of the Old Testament — Genesis and

Psalms — and 27 books of the New Testament) and parts of the Old Testament (Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, 1-4 Kings, Daniel, Ruth, John and Esther).

Hundreds of mosques, churches and houses of worship have been built or restored. They include Orthodox churches in Tashkent, Samarkand and Navoi, a Catholic church in Tashkent, and an Armenian church in Samarkand. Pursuant to a Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan of 22 August 2003, 15 locations — religious complexes, places of pilgrimage and burial sites — have been placed under the authority of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan.

At the end of 2004, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the Society for the Blind together introduced a Braille version of the Holy Koran, making Uzbekistan the third country in the world to undertake such a good deed. Uzbekistan has approximately 24,000 inhabitants deprived of the faculty of sight. From now on, special boarding schools, public libraries and anyone making a request will receive Braille versions of the Koran.

Uzbekistan's system of religious education includes the Tashkent Islamic Institute, 10 madrassas and Orthodox and Protestant seminaries.

At the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, the Tashkent Islamic University was established in September 1999. The University produced its first bachelor's degree graduates in 2003 and its first master's degree graduates in 2005. Attached to the University are a vocational secondary college and a secondary school.

A Christian-Muslim conference entitled **"Living together under one heaven"** was held in Tashkent in 1995. It was attended by representatives of the World Council of Churches and a number of foreign churches.

In 1996, two significant events took place:

- November brought the 125th anniversary of the Tashkent and Central Asian eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church. Alexei II, the first Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia ever to visit in the history of the Orthodox Church in Central Asia, attended the commemoration of that occasion;
- December saw the Evangelical Lutheran community of Uzbekistan celebrate its centenary as the only Lutheran Church in Central Asia.

In 2001, the Tashkent and Central Asian eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church celebrated its 130th anniversary.

In 2002, the Roman Catholic Church celebrated the centenary of the revival of Catholicism in Central Asia.

In October 2003, events were held in Samarkand to celebrate the centenary of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Republic of Uzbekistan does its utmost to provide its citizens with a guaranteed right to freedom of belief and religion.